

The construction of Australia Day: A study of public relations as ‘new cultural intermediaries’

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Australia Day is a foremost expression of Australian culture and identity, but historical and critical analysis shows that, far from being an organic or spontaneous expression and celebration of identity and culture, Australia’s national day has been ‘manufactured’ by what can be identified as ‘new cultural intermediaries’. Drawing on but reinterpreting and updating Pierre Bourdieu’s concept to account for twenty-first century media and public communication practices, this article reports a transdisciplinary study which shows that the organized and orchestrated practices of public relations and the activities of PR practitioners have been instrumental in the creation of Australia Day and in the production, distribution, and interpretation of symbolic materials, presentations, and representations of national identity and culture that it reflects. This analysis identifies and explores a significant underestimation and marginalisation of the activities and influence of PR within media and cultural studies, as well as Australian history, sociology, and politics, to illuminate a ‘blind spot’ in these disciplines. It argues for further transdisciplinary research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary society and culture and create more transparent PR practices.

Key words: Cultural intermediaries; promotional culture; public relations; PR; Australia Day

Australia Day is a foremost expression of Australian culture and identity, celebrated with much fanfare each year on a nationally declared public holiday. The National Australia Day Council (NADC) describes the national day as one on which Australians ‘come together as a nation to celebrate what’s great about Australia and being Australian. It’s the day to reflect on what we have achieved and what we can be proud of in our great nation’ (NADC 2011a).

The theme for Australia Day in 2011 was ‘celebrate what’s great’ – even though the national Australia Day Web site acknowledges that many indigenous Australians refer to 26 January as ‘survival day’ or ‘invasion day’ (NADC 2011b), and the official history of Australia Day by Elizabeth Kwan records that ‘Aboriginal Australians have continued to feel excluded from what has long been a British pioneering settler celebration’ (2007). The upbeat rallying theme of Australia Day points to the focus of this article which reports research that unpacks the construction of Australia Day to identify the pivotal role played by ‘promotional intermediaries’ – in particular, public relations practitioners as a group of influential but largely under-studied ‘new cultural intermediaries’.

While Australia Day has been studied by historians such as Inglis (1967) and Curran and Ward (2010), and particular national Australia Day celebrations such as the bicentenary have been analysed within media and cultural studies (e.g. Bennett et al. 1992), the events, materials, and discourses associated with Australia Day have not been examined in any detail as the products of what Wernick (1991) referred to as ‘promotional culture’. Also, despite extensive research into the role of cultural intermediaries, the nature, activities, and influence of cultural intermediaries in Australia’s national day and its associated discourses of

nationalism and national identity have been only scantily explored. Thus, this study addressed a significant blindspot in historical, media and cultural studies.

Specifically, this article presents evidence that the practices of public relations (PR) played a prominent role in creating Australia Day in the nineteenth century; in its struggle to gain public support through the mid-twentieth century in the face of public apathy when it was described as a ‘festival in search of a meaning’ (Curran and Ward 2010, 199); in its ‘management’ of criticisms in relation to imperialism, colonialism and ethnocentrism in the 1970s; to its celebration of the bicentenary in 1988 and its representations of Australia in the 21st century.

This research informs our understanding of the construction of national identity and culture and serves as a case study illustrating the under-researched and narrowly understood role of PR in major events, institutions, and social, cultural, and political issues.

Evolving understandings of cultural intermediaries

This analysis is framed within the two inter-related concepts of ‘new cultural intermediaries’ and ‘promotional intermediaries’ and their role in culture and society. These intermediaries have been identified by a number of scholars, including Bourdieu (1984) and Williams (1962), as operating within and influencing culture, understood as ‘a particular way of life that is shared by a community and shaped by values, traditions, beliefs, material objects, and territory’ (Lull 2000, 130). Australia Day, from its earliest iterations, has been an expression and celebration of the particular way of life that emerged and continues to emerge in what is now the nation-state of Australia, and it explicitly presents and represents values, traditions, and beliefs and produces symbolic material objects and territory – both in the sense of social as well as geographic space.

Culture is also seen as ‘the pattern of meaning embedded in symbolic forms, including actions, utterances, and meaningful objects of various kinds, by virtue of which individuals communicate with one another and share their experiences, conceptions, and beliefs’ (Thompson 1990, 132). By this definition also, Australia Day is an important site for study as it involves the production of symbolic forms and is a series of events involving actions, utterances, and the production and distribution of meaningful objects to communicate experiences, conceptions and beliefs.

New cultural intermediaries

While ‘cultural intermediaries’ is a long-standing concept first discussed by Bourdieu (1984), there has been considerable evolution in thinking in recent times and calls for a broader understanding of cultural intermediaries in contemporary societies. As Hesmondhalgh notes, Bourdieu’s reference to cultural intermediaries in *Distinction* referred to ‘a particular type of new petite bourgeoisie profession associated with cultural commentary in the mass media’ (2007, 66). Bourdieu identified cultural intermediaries as most typically ‘the producers of cultural programs on TV and radio or the “critics” of quality newspapers and magazines and all the writer-journalists and journalist-writers’ (1984, 325). His oft-quoted reference to ‘occupations involving presentations and representation’ including advertising and marketing and ‘institutions providing symbolic goods and services’ (1984, 359) was a description of what he termed the ‘new petite bourgeoisie’ in which he saw cultural intermediaries as a specific sub-set. However, as Curtin and Gaither (2007) note, use of the term ‘cultural intermediaries’ has strayed far from Bourdieu’s original description.

In today's media-saturated and *mediatized* world (Couldry 2004; Croteau and Hoynes 2003; Krotz 2009), it can be argued that the distinction seen by Bourdieu – that cultural intermediaries such as journalists, critics and commentators alone 'mediate' meaning between producers and consumers, while the new petite bourgeoisie occupations simply produce 'symbolic goods and services' – is increasingly blurred or non-existent. For instance, drawing on Nixon and du Gay (2002), Hodges (2006) says 'cultural intermediaries are by definition advertising practitioners, management consultants and public relations practitioners and other occupations involving information and knowledge intensive forms of work' and she described these as increasingly central to economic and cultural life (84).

Negus (2002) sees the term cultural intermediaries as problematic as a descriptive label and as an analytic concept because it privileges 'a particular cluster of occupations' (504), and he argues that a wider range of workers including corporate managers, accountants, and even factory workers can constitute cultural intermediaries (505–507). While this may be stretching the term too far, the long separation between studies of the production and consumption of media and culture has increasingly closed and a broader range of actors and agents involved in cultural production and processes of meaning-making has been identified.

Negus concludes that 'we still have a long way to go before we come close to fully understanding the practices that continue to proliferate in the space between production and consumption' (502). This analysis contributes to this broader examination of cultural intermediaries and their activities by identifying actors and practices described here as 'new cultural intermediaries'.

Promotional culture and promotional intermediaries

Bourdieu specifically named PR as one of the 'occupations involving presentations and representation' and 'providing symbolic goods and services', along with advertising, marketing, sales, fashion, and others (1984, 359). He stated:

The new petite bourgeoisie comes into its own in all the occupations involving presentations and representations (sales, marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, decoration and so forth) and in all the institutions providing symbolic goods and services" (1984, 359).

However, Bourdieu did not expand on or analyse these groups and their practices in any detail. In his specific examination of what he termed promotional culture, Wernick (1991) primarily focussed on advertising as stated in the title of his seminal book *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression*. Other studies such as that of Featherstone (1991) who broadly critiqued the role of cultural intermediaries in postmodern consumer culture; Negus (1992, 1999) who studied promotion in the music industry in the US and UK; and examination of the popularising of art by art institution marketers (Durrer and Miles 2009) have usefully highlighted the role of new types of cultural intermediaries, but largely ignored PR. Gray (2010) notes 'the omnipresence of promotion in much media and popular culture' (815), but only Negus refers to PR in saying that 'studies have shown that the cultural intermediaries of marketing and public relations can play a critical role in connecting production and consumption' (2002, 507).

Review of the literature shows that, despite identification of the influence of 'promotional intermediaries' as new cultural intermediaries, most focus in examining cultural intermediaries and promotional culture has been on marketing and advertising which are the most visible of the range of promotional practices that exist in contemporary capitalist societies. Beyond Bourdieu's passing mention of PR and Negus' inclusion of PR in the 'cluster of occupations' involved in cultural mediation, there has been little examination of

PR practitioners as cultural intermediaries other than in PR literature – and, even within the field, discussion has been limited and mostly framed within a functionalist perspective, as will be discussed in the following.

The blindspot toward PR

Examination of literature in history, sociology, journalism, and media and cultural studies reveals that a blindspot towards PR exists in two forms. In the first, the outputs and effects of PR are trivialized and marginalized as of little or no significance. For example, this commonly occurs in journalism and media studies where PR is vocally criticized as ‘spin’ – hyperbole, propaganda and manipulation of the media (Ewen 1996; Louw 2010) – and cited as ‘obstruction’ and ‘obfuscation’ of truth that journalists need to overcome (Jeffers 1977), but where its influence is downplayed or even denied. A review of the literature on the relationship between media and PR by DeLorme and Fedler (2003) reported that journalists and journalism scholars consistently deny that PR influences media and shapes public discourse – a conclusion supported by Cunningham and Turner (2010) in their seminal analysis of media and public communication in Australia (212). However, numerous empirical studies over the past 80 years (summarized in Macnamara 2012) show that this is not the case.

In the second, the outputs and effects of PR are ignored or unrecognized altogether. For instance, while studies of Australian identity such as those of Turner (1994) and White (1981) have highlighted the impact of ‘creative industries’ such as advertising, film, and television, they did not comment on the degree to which PR has been used in the construction of discourses of identity and nationhood. In what remains the most detailed historical account of Australia Day, Inglis (1967) notes the use of PR, but does not explore its application or influence in any detail. Similarly, examinations of PR in the public sphere by historians such as Griffen-Foley (2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004), Hancock (1999), Mills (1986), and Young (2004, 2007) have provided important but sporadic insights into the role and influence of PR.

This paucity of scholarly attention stands at odds with the size and growth of the PR industry. The federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2011) reports that there were 21,600 PR professionals employed in the private and public sector in Australia in 2010 – up from 18,700 in 2009 and 14,000 in 2008. There is also an estimated 1,150 PR consultancy firms in Australia (Cunningham and Turner 2010). DEEWR reports that ‘job prospects for public relations professionals are good’ and, notwithstanding some periods of downturn such as during the global financial crisis, expenditure on PR is growing at an average of 10 per cent each year worldwide (Sorrell 2008). Globally, PR is estimated to be an \$8 billion a year industry (Wilcox and Cameron 2010, and is a growing ‘creative industry’ and an expanding part of Australia’s ‘cultural economy’.

PR research

PR is defined in a range of ways, as the practices have changed over time and vary internationally, particularly between US and European models. Harlow (1976) identified 472 different definitions of PR and more have been developed since his review of the literature. One of the most parsimonious and widely-used definitions is provided by prominent US authors Grunig and Hunt (1984, 6) in a landmark text which describes PR as ‘the management of communication between an organization and its publics’. Part of the reason for ambiguity and confusion surrounding PR is that it is a field of practice incorporating a range of roles, practices, methods, and activities.

Roles and practices commonly described as, or part of, PR include media relations (liaising with journalists and editors); community relations; government relations and lobbying;

investor relations; internal relations (also called employee relations), and stakeholder relations directed at other specific stakeholders or publics such as customers, investors, and influential groups (Broom 2009, 10–22; Wilcox and Cameron 2010, 10). Within these roles and practices, specific methods and activities that are deployed include media publicity (editorial coverage); promotional events such as launches, exhibitions, open days, and public meetings); speeches and presentations; organizational publications such as newsletters, information brochures and reports; films and videos; and informational Web sites (Macnamara 2012). Recognition of these components of PR is important in analyzing the practice in the case study examined and in the context of culture and society generally.

Research conducted within the PR field also has mostly failed to engage with the wider social and cultural implications of the practice and suffered from four significant shortcomings that have contributed to this blindspot and knowledge gap. First, most documented histories of PR are American (e.g. Cutlip 1994, 1995; Hiebert 1966; Marchand 1998; Olasky, 1987; Pearson 1992; Tye 2002). L'Etang has lamented that 'US scholars have always tended to assume the activities referred to as PR have been invented by Americans and then exported elsewhere' (2008a, 328). The limited historical studies of PR in Australia are also heavily US-orientated (e.g. Tymson and Sherman 1987; Stanton and Phillips 1998; Quarles and Rowlings 1993; Tymson, Lazar, and Lazar 2008). In these, the origin of PR in Australia is commonly located in the activities of Hollywood press agents and the visit by General Douglas MacArthur and his PR entourage of 35 in 1942 (Zawawi 2009, 44; Tymson, Lazar, and Lazar 2008). These studies fail to explore earlier, culturally-specific histories of PR in Australia, even though local histories such as L'Etang's (2004) examination of PR in Britain has provided rich new perspectives for understanding PR and its role in society.

A second shortcoming of existing research into PR, as noted by Holtzhausen (2007) and others, is that most PR histories have been narrowly focussed on activities explicitly defined as 'public relations' rather than public communication practices that characterize the field, which has omitted significant events and activities from analysis. A broader more inclusive understanding of PR that recognizes temporal, geographic, and cultural variations in terminology and practice needs to be applied, noting that PR is frequently referred to as *publicity*, *promotion*, *media relations*, *public information*, and other titles (Broom 2009, 23; Macnamara 2005, 22–23).

A third limitation in PR research is that most historical studies have focussed on pioneering specialist practitioners (see Sheehan 2007, 2009) – what a recent historical analysis of PR by Vos calls an 'actor-centred functionalist' approach (2011, p. 125). The practices of institutions such as governments and organizations that have played a fundamental role in nation-building, forging national identity, and shaping culture and society have been largely ignored, prompting calls for a 'much broader view' of PR (L'Etang 2008a, 327). This line of approach also draws attention to PR as an instrument of *governmentality*. PR practices reported in this study include 'techniques developed in institutions and discourses to govern' and illustrate power and struggle in hegemonic and Foucauldian forms conducted through the 'productive forces and institutions of modernizing societies' (Hartley 2002, 183).

Fourthly, as Karlberg (1996) and Jelen (2008) note, historical analyses of PR have failed to identify and examine the wider social, political, and cultural implications of the practices. In his recent analysis of the origins of PR, Vos (2011) argued that a 'cultural logic' more fully informs understanding of PR than the dominant 'functionalist logic' or even an 'institutional logic' (p. 119). In this view, PR is, in the first instance, created from cultural factors such as social values and temporal context and, in turn, contributes to the ongoing maintenance and shaping of culture.

This view has received some focus in recent PR scholarship, such as Curtin and Gaither's (2007) text on international PR, an article by Hodges (2006) and recent conference papers by Daymon and Surma (2009) and Schoenberger-Orgad (2009). Curtin and Gaither have advocated a cultural-economic model of PR theorized within the 'circuit of culture' developed by cultural studies scholars (du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay and Negus 1997) which they say places culture 'squarely at the centre of PR practice' (206).

However, while Hodges argues that 'the public relations industry needs to explore the idea of public relations as a shaper of culture – an institution and a process that is sensitive to the influences of culture and, more significantly, which itself contributes to it' (2006, 83), most PR literature focuses more on positioning PR within culture with a predominantly functionalist perspective. For instance, Curtin and Gaither state at the beginning of chapter one of their text that 'this book addresses these issues by using a cultural studies approach to develop international public relations theory that is culturally sensitive, reflexive, and dynamic' (2007, 3). Hodges states her purpose as advancing understanding of the 'contribution made by public relations to the development of contemporary cultures', but frames her analysis within the rubric of international professionalization of PR and concludes with a recommendation that 'the industry establish its current functions and potential for meeting human needs within differing cultural contexts' (2006, 88). In short, while demonstrating that culture and PR are intertwined (Daymon and Surma 2009, 1), most analysis connecting PR and culture focus on advocating a multicultural approach rather than dominant Western-centric views, largely with a view to increasing the acceptance and effectiveness of PR globally. Taylor and Kent's (2006) examination of the role of PR in nation-building comes closest to identifying PR as a significant cultural intermediary. This analysis provides further long overdue attention and specificity to examination of the role of PR in social construction and the creation of culture.

Methodology

This research used a qualitative case study approach (Stake 1994; Yin 2009) framed within an interpretative / constructivist paradigm, although findings were also substantially informed by empirical data drawn from statistics and historical archives. A single case was intensively examined using three research methods: (1) archival and records search; (2) content analysis of documents and texts (e.g. promotional materials, plans, and media coverage); and (3) oral history interviews.

The case was purposively selected as an exemplar site of presentations and representations of national identity and culture, informed by the conceptual question as is appropriate in qualitative research, rather than a concern for statistical representativeness of PR practice in Australia (Miles and Huberman 1994, 29).

Analysis drew of several theoretical frameworks. While this study was primarily framed within theories in relation to cultural intermediaries and promotional culture as outlined in the literature review, definitions and identification of PR practices drew on the Four Models of PR outlined by Jim Grunig and Todd Hunt (1984) and Excellence theory of PR (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, and Dozier 2002). Analysis was also informed by understandings of political economy (Mosco 2009), propaganda (Bernays 1928, 1955; Jowett and O'Donnell 2006), the public sphere (Dahlgren 2009; Habermas 2006), and nationhood and nationalism (Berlant 1991; Bhabha 1990; Taylor and Kent 2006).

Archival materials were accessed in the collections and records of the National Archives of Australia, State Records of NSW, the State Library of NSW, the Australia Day Council of

NSW, the National Australia Day Council, the Public Relations Institute of Australia, and private collections.

Interviewees included John Trevillian, Director General of the Office of Protocol and Special Events in the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet and CEO of the Australia Day Council of NSW, and Katie Melrose, Director, Communication and Corporate Strategy of the Australia Day Council of NSW. Trevillian is one of the longest-serving Australia Day committee member nationally, involved for over 20 years. Melrose has worked with the Australia Day Council for more than a decade and has been involved in collecting and centralising records of Australia Day with the State Records Office of NSW. In addition, transcripts of recorded interviews with the late Sir Asher Joel, a former publicist for Australia Day and member of the national council were reviewed.

Findings – Constructing national identity and culture with PR

Australia Day commemorates establishment of the first British settlement at Port Jackson in NSW on 26 January 1788. In the early years of white settlement, the anniversary of this date was mostly commemorated with informal celebrations. For instance, historian Manning Clark (1981) has noted that in 1808 this anniversary was observed with ‘drinking and merriment’. The first official celebrations were held in 1818 when 26 January was proclaimed a public holiday and festivities included a 30-gun salute fired from a battery at Dawes Point (Kwan 2007) and an official dinner at Government House, followed by a ball hosted by the Governor’s wife Mrs Macquarie (Australia Day Council of NSW 2010). Little is known about the organizers of these events. It is most likely that they were arranged by volunteers and the staff of government officials, and attendance was restricted to the colony’s elite. Thus, they could not logically be described as professional PR practices.

However, this began to change in 1838 when major public celebrations were organized to mark the Jubilee of European settlement and the date was promoted as a ‘day for everyone’ (Australia Day Council of NSW 2010). Official celebrations included sporting and cultural events and in Sydney crowds lined the harbour foreshores enjoying a day of entertainment which culminated in evening fireworks. The objective of these events was not to promote sports, art, or music, but to engage the public in a celebration of and support for particular political and social endeavours – namely, the colonization of Australia by the British Empire.

Despite growing interest in celebrating ‘Anniversary Day’ or ‘Foundation Day’, as it was alternatively known, the date was not universally commemorated. Colonies other than NSW celebrated the dates of their own founding. Nevertheless, there were stirrings of nationalist sentiment across the Australian colonies. These were harnessed in 1888 when major public communication and promotional activities were undertaken to mark the centenary of European settlement. Centenary commemorations included public ceremonies, parades, exhibitions, sporting events, special church services, and public entertainment events. Also, information leaflets, posters, and mementos, as well as media publicity were used to promote the anniversary in NSW and the other colonies.

In *Celebrating the Nation: A Critical Study of Australia’s Bicentenary*, Bennett et al. (1992) note the editorial of *The Bulletin* of 26 January 1888 written by James Edmond which described to the centenary as ‘a childish, frothy, boastful celebration so carefully worked up by the pitiable politicians of New South Wales’ (Edmond 1888 cited in Bennett et al. 1992, xiii). Bennett draws attention to the politically and culturally motivated rather than organic nature of Australia Day celebrations of national identity. However, it was not the politicians of NSW who were the architects of Australia Day, at least not directly. Analysis shows that

business and community groups formed organizations to conduct campaigns and they as well as politicians engaged professional intermediaries to present and represent their interests in symbolic forms to influence public attitudes and behaviours.

By the 1880s, public communication in relation to a national day began to include persuasive campaigning by organized groups calling for federation of the colonies as a nation and the creation of a single national day. One such group was the Australian Natives' Association (ANA). Established in Victoria in 1871 as a mutual society for native-born 'Australians', the ANA called for all Australian colonialists to celebrate 26 January as their national day (Australia Day Council of NSW 2010). The organization's promotional efforts through the media and in public meetings initially resulted in 26 January being labelled 'ANA Day' in Victoria from the 1880s through to the 1910s.

The ANA persisted with its campaign to make 26 January Australia's national day, and from 1918 it advocated use of the name 'Australia Day' rather than commonly used alternatives. This campaign was perhaps inspired by a short-lived 'Australia Day' declared on 30 July 1915 as a government propaganda initiative to raise funds for the war effort (Kwan 2007). In 1930, the ANA formally called for 26 January to be declared Australia Day nationally and commenced a five-year campaign in support of its policy, using many of the techniques of PR including media publicity, public events, speeches, and information literature such as posters and leaflets. The name Australia Day was subsequently adopted nationally in 1935, although it was celebrated as a long weekend closest to the date in most States until 1994 when all states and territories agreed to celebrate Australia Day on 26 January.

While the event organizers, speech writers, authors of promotional literature, media publicists, and organizations engaged in these public campaigns and celebrations did not refer to themselves or their activities as 'public relations' or 'PR', the practices of PR were clearly in existence. In addition to the use of communication materials now widely recognized as the handiwork of PR, the ANA also can be seen as a special interest group, or 'lobby' group, engaged in persuasive public communication activities and government relations which are today identified as strategies and tactics of PR (Broom 2009; Wilcox and Cameron 2010).

The sesquicentennial celebration of 150 years of European settlement in 1938 was a major affair and was significant in the context of this study for several reasons. As well as the traditional regatta and other sporting and cultural events, the sesquicentennial celebrations in Sydney included a procession through the city's streets entitled the 'March of Progress'. Commencing a few days later, the third British Empire Games were included a part of the celebrations. Also, a number of unofficial Australia Day events were staged including public protests by Aboriginal groups which declared 26 January a 'Day of Mourning' to draw attention to the 'mistreatment of Aborigines' (Kwan 2007). Aboriginal opposition to 26 January being celebrated as a national day emerged as a major issue that later called for *issue management* – a recognized specialist function of contemporary PR (Heath 1997; Macnamara 2012).

A further significant aspect of the 1938 Sesquicentennial is that PR (albeit still referred to as publicity) became an officially recognized element of the planning and management of Australia Day. Asher Joel, later knighted, was appointed 'publicity officer' by the NSW government in 1937 to help promote the coronation of King George VI and the sesquicentenary working with the 150th Anniversary Celebrations Committee. Although historical accounts of Australian PR highlight the establishment of Joel's PR consultancy firm in 1946 (PRIA 2010), his 1937 move from journalism¹ into PR, a growing trend through the twentieth century, has been largely ignored. What is mostly highlighted in PR histories is

that Joel served in the military during World War II as a staff officer in New Guinea and then as a PR officer with the Commander of the US Seventh Fleet in the South West Pacific, before joining the Australian PR staff of General Douglas MacArthur in 1944–45.

Joel's involvement in Australia Day illustrates the direct relationship between PR and Australia's national day. Joel was a pioneer of PR in Australia who went on to become one of its most prominent practitioners and joint founder of the Public Relations Institute of Australia in 1949 (PRIA 2010). As well as being actively involved in the promotion of many other major national events, his association with Australia Day continued until the 1980s when he was a board member of the National Australia Day Council that played a leading role in organization of the 1988 bicentenary celebrations. The work of Asher Joel demonstrates a significant strategic involvement of PR in this key construction site of national and cultural identity.

Public support for Australia Day remained ambivalent even after it was formally established as the national day, a challenge that was again addressed with PR. In *The Unknown Nation*, Curran and Ward observe that even in the 1960s Australia Day struggled to be a 'spontaneous expression by the people rather than a highly organized demonstration' which was the hope of successive governments and nationalistic organizations (2010, 203). Curran and Ward described Australia Day circa 1960s a 'festival in search of a meaning' for which public support was lacking on account of the 'superficiality of the occasion and the meaninglessness of its symbolism' (199). Links to British imperialism were seen as inappropriate in a nation rapidly becoming multicultural and increasingly aware of its responsibilities to its indigenous population. In 1970, protests were organized in response to the re-enactment of the landing by Captain James Cook (Curran & Ward 2010, 208) and continued throughout the decade. Australia Day was labelled 'Invasion Day' and public support waned. Curran and Ward observe that, by the end of the 1970s, Australia Day had become a 'shambles' and a 'farce' (210, 221).

Such challenges saw governments again turn to PR in creating and propagating imagery and symbols of nationhood and national identity. A national Australia Day Committee (later changed to Council) was established in 1979 and Australia Day councils or committees were subsequently formed in each state. Also, from the 1980s onwards, Australia Day has been promoted using strategic and increasingly professionalized PR including the appointment of specialist staff to manage communication and the engagement of PR consultancy firms. A major turning point was the bicentenary celebrations of 1988. Kwan notes:

The Australia Day Committee and the federal government were struggling with what respected Committee member, Sir Asher Joel, termed 'the crisis of identity... of establishing an Australian identity which will unite each and every one of us, surmounting all the borders, imaginary or real, of race, creed or class status' (2007).

Joel was instrumental in providing high-level strategic PR advice and expertise during planning of the bicentenary. The bicentenary is analyzed in detail elsewhere (e.g. Bennett et al. 1992), but what is noteworthy here is that, despite some criticism, it proved to be a spectacular celebration attracting broad public involvement and support, providing further evidence of the intrinsic role of PR. Joel's legacy is discernible in the fact that the Australia Day Council of NSW has consistently engaged public relations agencies over the past two decades, as well as employing several full-time PR specialists within the Office of the Premier and Cabinet to work with the Australia Day Council of NSW in promoting Australia Day (Melrose pers.comm., 31 May, 2009).

Australia Day continues to provide an ideal site to examine PR practice as its public communication campaigns are not supported to any significant extent by advertising. Director, Communication and Corporate Strategy of the Australia Day Council of NSW working within the NSW Premier's department, Katie Melrose, says 'Australia Day has never had significant budget and still doesn't to this day'. The organizing council receives some in-kind advertising (free space) from supportive media, but does not conduct a paid media advertising campaign. In an interview, Melrose said frankly: 'we realized a while ago, given that we were lacking in budget to go out there and do blockbuster advertising campaigns, that we are really driven by PR' (pers. comm., 31 May 2009).

Director General of the Office of Protocol and Special Events in the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet and CEO of the Australia Day Council of NSW, John Trevillian supports this claim. Australia Day celebrations are organized through an extensive network of local committees and community groups, to which Trevillian pays tribute. However, Australia Day Councils develop themes to be promoted, strategies, and messaging which are 'rolled out' to the network of local celebration organizers. Trevillian openly acknowledges that it is the communication specialists who develop these themes and strategies. He said: 'With all respect to our Board, strategy has come from our officers', specifically identifying Melrose as a key Australia Day strategist and promoter during the past decade (pers. comm., 31 May 2009).

Melrose, along with her predecessors and her team are identified as having played a key role over the past decade in 'repositioning' Australia Day away from its imperial origins and negative associations with 'invasion' and dispossession of Aboriginal people, to an 'inclusive' celebration of Australian identity and culture. Such framing and reframing were part of *issue management* undertaken by Australia Day PR practitioners during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s.

In interviews, Melrose revealed some of the mechanics of this management of information and public perceptions. She reported that the Australia Day Council of NSW established 'strategic partnerships with government agencies and bodies like the NSW Council for Reconciliation [and] the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (as it was then known)' to gain cooperation in promoting Australia Day. An early step was introducing Welcome Country and Acknowledgement of Land into all Australia Day ceremonies and events. However, planning went much further. Representatives of Australia's indigenous people were involved in a regional seminar tour to speak directly with organizers about including indigenous culture, protocols, and participation in National Day activities.

In 2003, the *Woggan-ma-gule* morning ceremony was introduced to honour the ancestral creation spirits of Aboriginal culture who are revered and seen as the safe keepers of the land. In an example of symbolic interactionism and cultural performance negotiated through PR, this is now the opening event of each Australia Day in Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens overlooking Farm Cove, an area considered an important meeting and ceremonial site to the Gadigal people who once lived around Sydney Harbour, as well as neighbouring clans.

The Australia Day Council, led by its PR planners, works with a wide range of cultural institutions including the Art Gallery of NSW, the Powerhouse Museum, the Historic Houses Trust, the Police Museum, and Sydney Observatory and also with schools. The Council liaises with cultural and with educational institutions 'particularly focusing on film, photography and art' through competitions and festivals, according to Melrose. The purposeful planned communication of pre-prepared messages about nationalism and Australian identity is clear in her interview statement that the Australia Day Council

‘provided institutions with various resources to simplify the communication process with students and to ensure messages and information were consistent and accurate’ (pers. comm., 14 April 2011). The Australia Day Council has developed ‘an extensive database of national educational institutions’ and distributes a range of information materials including its ‘Big Australia Day Book’.

In addition to its internal PR resources, Australia Day has engaged prominent actors, artists, film makers and directors, and writers in judging panels for competitions and as dignitaries to launch events, and draws on the voluntary services of a substantial number of ‘friends of Australia Day’ whose ranks include a strategically assembled cadre of communication and PR specialists. Trevillian said: ‘Since 1988, the bicentenary, we have developed a team of 35–50 marketing and communication people who give time and effort to supporting Australia Day’ (pers. comm., 31 May 2009). The structure of the Australia Day Council in NSW today further illustrates the pervasive and deep involvement of PR in its operations with five of its members being PR or media professionals.

In addition to demonstrating the institutional use of PR practices and the functionalist role of PR specialists in advising and shaping strategy and policy, the Australia Day Council also demonstrates a two-way adaptive approach to PR and promotion which scholars note is more societally-orientated and culturally-embedded than the simplistic representations of PR portrayed in the media (Grunig et al. 2002; L’Etang 2008b), although questions about power and discourse remain. For instance, in response to questions about social engineering and ‘manufacture of consent’, Melrose points out that promotion of Australia Day responded to and engaged in the discourse of multiculturalism as it emerged in Australia in place of earlier imperial and colonial conceptualisations of Australian identity. Melrose emphasizes that the communication program of Australia Day encourages people to celebrate the National Day in their own way. ‘The Australia Day Council of NSW creates a platform for debate and tools that enable Australians to reflect on the meaning of Australia day and what it means to them’. She adds: ‘it is really up to the Australian people on how they choose to celebrate. ADCNSW’s role is to encourage celebration and ask people to think about the meaning of the day, and gather communities and provoke thought’ (pers. comm., 14 April 2011).

That provocation of thought and encouragement of debate included inviting Dr Lowitja O’Donoghue to deliver the Australia Day address in 2000 in which she spoke of ‘the things that divide us – the inequities which are so entrenched in our society – or the ideological differences which we rightly debate’ (O’Donoghue 2000). O’Donoghue’s address marked a major milestone and illustrated the evolution in practices of Australia Day public communication and promotion that have been both informed and influenced by cultural factors, including cultural shifts, as well acting as influences on culture. It is this largely unrecognized ‘two-way street’ of PR that has perhaps ensured the survival of Australia Day and given it currency and relevance. It also illustrates the interactive, allegedly ‘symmetrical’ nature of PR that is described in Excellence theory of PR (L. Grunig, J. Grunig and Dozier 2002) – a model that espouses *co-orientation* between organizations and institutions and their publics, adaptation and balanced two-way interaction. Australia Day campaigns of the 1990s and 2000s have included extensive research to monitor and understand public attitudes and to respond to these with appropriate messages (e.g. media analysis firm CARMA International² was employed for more than a decade, working in conjunction with Australia Day’s staff and PR consultancy firms). However, imbalance in power and resources and the privileging of management and organizational discourses in PR strategies remain problematic issues in a social and cultural context.

Conclusions

The creation and promotion of Australia Day and its messages over almost two centuries illustrates that promotional intermediaries including PR practitioners are influential cultural intermediaries. Analysis of the history of Australia Day reveals that creation of Australia's national day and discourses of national identity were not organic, spontaneous or straightforward social and cultural developments, but the result of an active, ongoing, orchestrated campaign involving a range of public communication practices and activities that fit within established descriptions of the practice of PR. These include public events, public meetings, speeches, promotional literature such as posters and information leaflets, promotional films, and media publicity organized with strategic intent and operationalized with increasing professionalism over the years.

However, this analysis illustrates the two-way relationship between PR and culture and has significant implications for media and cultural studies as well as for PR scholarship. The history of Australia Day shows that the practices of PR emerged in Australia prompted and shaped by local cultural values and temporal contexts. They were not simply imported from America as popular histories claim – although American 'boosterism' (Vos 2011, 132) and neoliberal capitalism (Couldry 2010) have influenced contemporary commercial PR practices. PR and promotion of Australia Day arose out of early colonial culture influenced by British imperialism and a rising spirit of nationalism that was endemic (if misguided at times).

Furthermore, rather than viewing PR in narrow functionalist or institutional terms as one-way top-down manipulation, as are the most common conceptualizations (Vos 2011), PR is revealed as an adaptive practice operating within social, political and cultural contexts. Analysis of the campaign for and promotion of Australia's national day over the past 175 years shows that changing cultural values (e.g. independence from Britain, multiculturalism, and growing recognition of indigenous culture and rights) shaped Australia Day PR, with significant evolution in the identity, images and messages promoted. PR practices are developed *in* society; not simply imposed on society. This recognition supports Curtin and Gaither's and Hodges' calls for a cultural model of PR and understanding of what Vos calls PR's 'cultural logic'.

However, beyond Hodges' argument that 'the public relations industry needs to explore the idea of public relations as a shaper of culture' (2006, 83), this analysis calls for media and cultural studies, as well as the disciplines of sociology, politics and history, to address the blindspot that has led to the *ghettoization* of public relations as a sub-discipline in functionalist management and marketing theory and resulted in an incomplete understanding of contemporary discourses, power-relations and cultural production and distribution.

The field of media studies needs to shake off its ideologically-based disdain of PR and its narrow focus on publicity to recognize the broad range of PR activities and their role in social construction and culture. Critiques of PR within journalism and media studies are frequently couched in clichés such as 'spin' and 'flak' and side-tracked by historical antipathies which distract media scholars from more informed analysis of PR.

Given that cultural studies is concerned with consciousness, discourses and power in various forms, identity-formation, and the role and effects of mediated popular culture (Hartley 2002, 49), this disciplinary field more than most can benefit from and contribute to a more informed understanding of PR. While recognising audience agency and what Lull (2006) calls the 'pull' side of culture, the 'push' side of culture 'supplies a ready stockpile of

material and symbolic resources, and a general framework for interpreting the world' (38). The role of media in supplying those materials and symbolic resources has been extensively studied (Curran and Morley 2006; Hartley 2002; Lull 2000; Poster 1995). However, the question asked in agenda-setting studies, 'who sets the media agenda?' as well as broader questions about framing of public issues have never been adequately answered. The wide range of cultural production and mediation activities undertaken by PR practitioners beyond traditional media publicity have rarely if ever been examined critically in a transdisciplinary way. Media and cultural studies, as well as PR, will benefit from such broader critical analysis.

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² See www.carma.com.

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